

DELTA

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DELTA

The Cambridge Literary Magazine

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Editorial

In our last editorial, we expressed the hope of accompanying some of the creative writing in this issue by critical commentary. At present, however, it seems quite hard enough to find material in Cambridge sufficiently responsible in intention to be worth criticising in public: the job that needs doing seems rather to be the elementary one of trying to attract some intelligent attention and concern to the public discussion of literature in this university. Thus "The Approval Game" is indeed a thoroughly-documented article on some recent undergraduate work, but the writer's purpose is to link his specific criticisms to a general protest against the current withholding of Cambridge's intelligence from Cambridge literary activity. We hope it will succeed in stinging readers into argument: it is too long since *Delta* carried a correspondence column.

The fact that for some time now *Delta* has not been offered any fiction which seemed worth publishing prompts us to think that perhaps undergraduates are more likely to produce prose writing that really does achieve some imaginative insight into human behaviour if they attempt documentary reporting from personal experience rather than that notoriously treacherous form, the short story. To write a short story—or, for that matter, a poem—is an obvious enough way of showing oneself to be an "imaginative writer," but all too often a real effort of human analysis is inhibited by the ease with which a superficial facility for "ironic" plots—too often a mere artificial wrapping-up—or of poetical mannerisms, may serve to conceal an actual poverty and confusion of thoughts and feelings. It was with this in mind that we found *Le Grand Carcenac* more interesting than the fiction submitted: it displays an alertness of observation, a sense of what is important and what is unimportant in the incidents described that is all too often missing in more "imaginative," or (to be accurate), more fanciful writing.

Inasmuch as undergraduate writing—through a regrettable specialisation of effort—is bound to be considerably (if unobtrusively) affected by the state of the English school, we are glad to be able to publish John Newton's article because in its context here it emphasises the inevitable, but often unrecognised, connection between literary ability and a capacity for maintaining and criticising ideas and beliefs. A work of art is a statement of intelligence, both conscious and habitual, as well as of "sensitivity"; and woolly thinking in critical argument may often engender woolly thinking in creative composition. If *The Revelation* seems nonetheless to be

somewhat outside *Delta's* normal province, we felt obliged to include it since the *Cambridge Review*, for which this article was commissioned, refused to print it, and it seems important that a frank and fully-argued opinion of Mrs. Krook's book should be given in Cambridge. We were also anxious to see that Geoffrey Strickland's important selection of Stendhal's journalism was given proper attention in Cambridge: not only was Strickland an early contributor to *Delta* (from Downing), but his book is easily the most valuable piece of Stendhalia published for some years, and its contents abound in lessons for us all, especially his recommendations to anyone starting a literary periodical.

Contributions for the next issue should reach the Editor by April 9th.

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Le Grand Carcenac

I asked for Paris or Marseilles, and with some kind of French logic they gave me Clermont-Ferrand, which is right between both in the Auvergne country. At first I let on that I was going as "assistant" to a *collège-technique*, but by the time I had left to take up the job I had promoted myself into a lectureship in a French college. I was in North America at the time, and "college" has a splendidly academic ring about it there, especially when pronounced with precision and confidence among people who have a real reverence for higher learning. By the time I reached Clermont I was myself convinced that the "position" I had come to take up would exact a great deal from me—more probably than I had to offer—in the way of learning, wit and intelligence.

The *collège-technique*, as it turned out, was built on American prison lines, high walls tipped with peaks of iron, clanging steel gates guarded by a concierge, and a grotesquely ugly block within the courtyard, all spotted brick and wired windows; loudspeakers pointed out from high up the walls of the block, and throughout the day a metallic voice would bark out the names of those on the

punishment list who were to report for bureaucratically-administered retribution. My first interview with M. le Directeur was in keeping with the general atmosphere of the establishment he had elected to run. I waited in an ante-chamber to his office, feeling very nervous and by now totally disillusioned about the nature of my functions as an "assistant". A blonde, tough-faced secretary hammered the keys of a typewriter at a desk opposite me, occasionally flashing a glance at a glass box above the door of Monsieur's room. I was trying to force myself into a state of suave composure, but her concern with the box disconcerted me and I, too, began to gaze at it anxiously. Suddenly the box leapt to life; red letters flashed angrily (I imagine they merely read *ENTREZ*) and a low droning sound filled the room. I looked at the Secretary, who went on typing with one hand while she fluttered the fingers of her other towards the door just as it began to swing open with a muted whistling sound. M. le Directeur sat at a large desk set four-square in the middle of a small but luxurious room. He was a portly, serious-looking man, very distinguished de Gaulle style—but his dignity seemed somehow imposed upon a basic absurdity, as if he were really Jaques Tati playing a solemn role. He greeted me with a grave hand-shake and a stiff bow, then settled back at the desk again. We looked politely at each other, and it was suddenly clear to both, I think, that neither of us had anything to say. He was more adept than I in this kind of situation, however; he gave me an enquiring nod of encouragement, and began to pluck judiciously at an ear-lobe. Hesitantly I stammered out a few words of appalling French, the total import of which, really, was "Me voilà!", and when I had finished he welcomed me to the school in a few exquisitely rhythmic sentences, shook me once again by the hand and left me to take it from there. Baffled and embarrassed, I withdrew, the door whistling behind me as I stepped back into the outer office.

The teaching, of course, was hell. The ages of the boys varied considerably; the younger ones, with pale, sombre faces and crew-cuts, looked like elderly midgets in their blue working aprons, while the older ones, smooth and sophisticated in appearance, frightened me with their air of casual boredom. My class was composed of boys between seventeen and twenty; a few were older than myself. I felt very guilty, at first, of having the right to enter and leave the school when I liked, while they, with their know-how and clear grasp of all the techniques of pleasure, were confined to the school-yard five days out of seven. I find it difficult now to remember all the faces and names clearly—the majority take exactly the same form in retrospect, tall, dark, with long, confident faces and quick brown French eyes. I suppose they were less tall than myself but my recollected composite figure of them is lean and willowy. Three of the students I do remember very clearly; one was a short, stocky boy of about seventeen, very, very black (he was from the Afrique

Noir) with a wide, handsome grin. Most of the time in class he spent lolling in his desk, arms wrapped around his knees, singing pop-songs and laughing explosively; his name was Casanova. His particular side-kick, Jay, was almost twenty, I believe, angular and tall, with an idiot smile, a jerky walk, and bad breath. My trouble with Casanova (whom I liked) and Jay (whom I loathed) began early on and never really ended. I had reached a compromise with my class almost immediately—the first in a series of such arrangements, which went in a descending scale as far as my authority and their behaviour were concerned. Anyway, the first compromise was simple but not effective: those who wanted to learn were cordially invited to do so; those who did not were asked to be silent. “You can sleep, if you want,” I said with spacious irony. As it turned out, no one wanted to learn. All my students were studying hotel-craft—how to wait, how to cook, how to be insolent though polite—and their interest in English, even if they were very serious indeed, did not extend beyond a desire to know the names of the commoner vegetables. But most of them were not at all serious, and having asked me if I could (a) play the guitar, (b) play the banjo, (c) play poker, (d) sing, and having received my string of negatives with mild but friendly jeering, they settled down fairly quietly to other things, leaving me to my own devices at the front of the class. All, that is, except Casanova and Jay, who pretended to take my invitation literally, and cradled in one another’s arms, simulated a noisy slumber. I was drily amusing at their expense in halting French; I was viciously sarcastic; I shouted at them; then I threatened to report them; in the end, I committed myself to seeing that they were punished. In fact, I behaved like a perfect fool. They pretended to slumber on, regardless, although occasionally I would catch sight of the white of Casanova’s eye over the ridge of Jay’s arm. At the end of the hour I headed, with sinking heart, to the director of hotel studies, and asked him to have a few words with Casanova and Jay. He was a thin, nervous man with a stammer and very aloof manners; he said he would look into the affair.

Well, he looked into it all right. When I turned up for lunch that day I was followed across the courtyard by Casanova and preceded by Jay—both of whom performed wild capers and shuffling dance steps. We did not speak to each other, but moved in a sort of grotesque, intimate harmony, while the small boys were cleared out of our path by other members of the class. After lunch I was escorted back to the main gate in the same manner, with again that unearthly silence, not even giggles or whispers, and with at least a hundred pair of eyes fixed on us. The gate slammed behind me, and as the porter’s key turned in the lock, I heard two voices raised in chant: “Nous sommes ecolés! Salaud, Salaud! Nous sommes ecolés! Salaud, Salaud!” And a great jeer went up.

Jay and Casanova had not yet finished with me, although the nightmare frog-dance across the courtyard was never repeated. I was glad of that, for though I felt rather proud at not having broken into a sprint on the second occasion, I had little real confidence in my ability to cling to a waning Anglo-Saxon dignity. The final Casanova-Jay incident took place a week later, after an interval of golden peace during which the whole class had settled into what seemed an amiable lethargy; they wrote letters and whispered among themselves, and I read novels at my desk in the front, while once or twice they would ask me for help with their English homework. I was pleased with the arrangement, naturally, and did not reflect on how far I had travelled from the pre-arrival vision of sophisticated seminars and philosophic debate. Lulled into a false security, I was walking across the yard one night (there were no lights in the middle, so that there was an expanse of pitch black around me) when I became uncomfortably aware of furtive scuffling sounds close behind. I began to walk a little faster, making for the patch of light in the distance that represented safety. The scufflings gave way to sniggers, then to total silence—except, of course, for the thunderclap of my own footsteps. Something sang out of the darkness and whipped past my ear, and a split second later a large, heavy object (probably a rock) dropped a few feet in front of me. I drew myself up, began to turn around, and then with a shout of panic wheeled back and loped the remaining space across the yard, my body bent low in a defensive crouch. I reached the door of the main block, hurled myself against it, and tumbled into the tiled hallway, where I squatted on the floor breathing heavily—scarcely aware of a large figure hovering above me and a courteous voice bidding me good-evening. When I finally dared raise my head, I was just in time to see M. le Directeur disappearing around a corner at the far end of the corridor.

After the brick-throwing incident, Casanova, Jay and I settled into an uneasy truce, but the class as a whole, presumably finding me easy meat, became wilder and nastier. They played cards, smoked, sang bawdy songs, and even, once, passed around a flask of brandy. Fortunately I discovered that eight of my twelve hours a week were on the “free time” schedule, so that nobody could check up (and my students were too compromised to complain, even in malice) if I cut my periods down to four a week. And at least I was getting well paid.

The third student, the one I remember best of all, was Carcenac. He was a square, stocky peasant from somewhere far into the Auvergne. His head was blocky and powerful, while his face, with its firm, clear features, would have been handsome if it hadn't worn a continual, oafish grin. Carcenac was the brute of the class, “le voyou”—whether self-appointed or elected by democratic consent I don't know; the other students made fun of him, in a rather

nervous way, and when they did his grin expanded and he would swing his lumpy great arms around in a flailing motion. He once performed what still seems to me a remarkable feat of physical exhibitionism; the class, as a whole, acted as promoters and I was the one real spectator: "Eh, Anglais! Regard Carcenac! Il va te montrer quelque chose!" Carcenac was standing above his desk, his fists gripping it tight around the edges. He flashed me a carnivorous smile, then with an audible *snap* of the wrists flicked the desk high above his head, swung it with a crash to its place again, and with a sickening thud brought his forehead down on the lid, full force. He somehow gave the impression, as he straightened up, that if his arms had not been so powerful in the restraining strength they gave to his grip, the desk would have smashed to pieces under the impact of that great, power-driven head. I turned back to my book with all the insouciance I could muster, but I felt genuinely apprehensive. Carcenac's next demonstration, the following lesson, was to be a great deal more unpleasant, however.

The class was unnaturally quiet when I came in; Carcenac was standing up at the back of the room, with the desks joined together around him in a semi-circle which opened into an aisle leading straight to my dais. They had obviously been waiting for me, and I realized at once that a trial of strength had been engineered. Carcenac gave me a ponderously sarcastic bow; he was a grotesque figure in baggy flannel trousers and stiff, high collar—grotesque, but with a sinister edge. He was holding a piece of string in his hands, and he began, with elaborate concern, to pull it from the pocket to which it seemed connected. Finally, frowning comically at the length of time the operation was taking, he gave the string a jerk, and a small, furry object leapt into view and bounced in the air at the end of the string. I moved closer and saw what appeared to be a length of pipe connecting the string to the ball of fur; another step, and I realized that the length of pipe was a rodent's leg, and the ball of fur was a mouse. The blob of red that formed a ridge above the string, I guessed to be a swollen blood vessel. "Voilà!" Carcenac beamed. "Un cadeau pour Monsieur l'anglais. For Meester Eengleeshman." I went back to the desk and stood behind it; the rest of the class was lounging in a corner, aloof, apparently unconcerned, very quiet. When I could finally bring myself to speak, my voice was high and piercing, totally disconnected with the appalled and frightened self that lurked, mute, within. "Carcenac. Give it to me. Donnez-le-moi. Give it here at once." The mouse still dangled in the air, about level with Carcenac's belt; it had uncoiled itself, and was stretching and curling up, stretching and curling up, making periodic leaps and clutches, and of course being jerked back by the tension of the string. Carcenac, clearly, had not the slightest intention of giving

it up; he stood grinning, quite amiably, with his free hand in his pocket. "Mais prenez-le, monsieur. C'est pour toi." I made another attempt at speech, but nothing emerged at all. The whole class was waiting for me to move; Carcenac was waiting for me to move; and a cold, observing eye, detached deep within myself, was waiting for me to move. I thought I would count ten, and then if nothing happened (I had no idea what *could* happen), I would go up to Carcenac and force him to give me the mouse. That's what I thought, and I remember even now the hysterical lucidity with which I proposed the project; I started to count, not realizing as I did so that I was already on my way down the aisle. By the time I got to *eight* I had reached Carcenac, and when I next fully grasped what was going on I had the string in my hand, although Carcenac was still in possession of the end. I gave a feeble tug, and Carcenac, probably as amazed as I was frightened, let go abruptly. The frantic, clawing little animal thudded against my waist and then hung straight, head down, its body stretched. I hate mice anyway, and the sight of the blood-bulge, the sleek fur and outstrained neck, brought me close to vomiting. Carcenac, whom for a second I had forgotten about, pushed his face close to mine—I can't remember what expression he wore, he might still have been smiling. Half in fright, half in anger, at least I like to think it was anger, I gave his shoulder a savage, uncontrolled push—savage and uncontrolled enough, anyway, to send him reeling so that the back of his knee caught the edge of the desk. He disappeared with a crash into a jumble of wood. I scurried back up the aisle, the mouse dangling and bouncing against my knee, and had just reached the door when Carcenac heaved himself into sight at the end of the room; he clambered over the spilled chairs, and galloped up the lane after me. I twisted the door-knob frantically, my mind too numb to register—except abstractly, like a film—what was happening. I shut my eyes and waited as the galloping noise increased. It ended abruptly in a hoarse shout and the clatter of falling objects. This time I got the door open and rushed into the yard, where I dropped the mouse. Before I could release it, however, it had scuttled off into a heap of rocks, trailing the string behind.

I could not bring myself to go back to class again that day: instead I went into town and bought a *velo-moteur* which I had been eyeing for some time, and drove far out into the Auvergne, had a long swim in one of the crazily-rushing rivers, and for a few hours forgot about the *Collège-Technique*. The next time I appeared for class the boys behaved very much as usual, shouting, playing cards, smoking. I read a novel at my desk, and looked up only once, to catch Carcenac smiling at me with his deadly, slack smile. "Ca va, Monsieur?" he inquired with mock politeness. "Ca va bien, merci, you grade A son of a bitch," I replied, humbly.

JAMES HOLLIDAY.

A Walk by the River with my Daughter

What did we see?

A horse, one cow, two cows, and a transformer,
The property of the Eastern Electricity Board,
Where, for a moment, holding the rusted paling
You felt the nervous hum of

DANGER.

That was what we saw.

Yet what I saw I could not tell you.

The matter was not that I could not count them

(As you thought I could)

The spikes of grass along the river wall,
Nor distinguish between Tufted Dog's Tail

And Rough-Stalked Meadow Grass,

Nor find the nest of the two birds that piped

Before the sun sank in the marshes :

Such the assured occupations of another age,

When the Plymouth Brother left his little boy with a notebook

Peering into the aquarium,

Or the Statesman warned little T.C.

Never to pick buds in the flower garden.

The Reverend Mr. Crabbe would have told you what we saw,

In another fashion, on those saltings :

Your father can only see with difficulty

What there is here at all.

Not that my eyesight is bad, for when the Kingfisher

Darts from the sluice, I catch him in a corner

Of my vision, and you share him, and even now

Can I lead your round bright eye

To the fish flash as the grandfatherly heron

Bangs him on the water under The Rocks?

What did we see?

Remember we saw a transformer?

I cannot even explain the transformer,

Except that it changes power into power,

And makes an endless exchange of energy

Which seems to me meaningless,

Much as the sun does, lying there where a King's Fleet

Once anchored,

Or as we do, even when we, like the fish in the bird's maw, we

Shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye :

DANGER

Is something I would not care to explain.

And as you grow older you will find your father still more evasive
On the subject of "What did we see?"
You can countenance violence in the nursery—
The carving knife, the cracked crown,
"She whipped them all soundly
And sent them to bed,
And here comes a chopper to chop off your head!"
—I find it difficult : and do you see the give-away
As I wince, out of fear, and in shame?

And I am, I suppose, in a sense, irresponsible,
Seeing the sun fall like that in the marshes,
To clasp you to me for warmth as the salt mist rises.
I would hide the transformer from you under the grass
And hide the grass itself as it dies into straw on the dyke-wall,
Clap my hands to make the heron rise
And drop a wounded flounder in the water,
Restore, restore my heart again
By patching with pitch that rotten ribbed hulk in the mud,
Float it again, while you play in the bilge with a can,
And push off into the stream with the tap, tap, tap,
"That taps the tarry boat with gentle blow."

We might pretend it was a victory :
The seams might hold for a week or a month,
And what would we see?
The screws loosen in the rowlock sockets,
The ebb run and the flood flow,
Along each bank the high straw mat
Marking the long violence of winter :
Nothing spectacular, no redeemable flotsam,
But petty tidemarks of the wold lining the coast.
And whether we went by sunrise or sunfall,
The one-legged bird beating up the little fish,
The mess of weed and jellyfish rising and sinking,
And behind us the oar-puddles spreading
Where I changed power into power.

But you, being young, would lose interest
Before one more day sank :
And I would lose courage
Before the October winds rose.
Shall we not go home now and share the same comfort
By asking each other :
What did we see?
And answering (for I can tell you that)

Belonging to the Eastern Electricity Board—
Because this was written on it clearly enough,
And the word DANGER in fading red letters.
Felixstowe ferry, 1952.

DAVID HOLBROOK.

The Revelation

The main part of Mrs. Krook's book, *Three Traditions in Moral Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 30/-), has been given as a course of lectures in the English Faculty for the Part II "English Moralists" paper. That paper calls on the student to study certain texts from Plato, Aristotle, St. Paul and St. Augustine as a background to the texts of the main subject, and in that way gives him an opportunity, as a general reader rather than as a qualified student of philosophy, to try certain classics of philosophy and theology. Through a detailed commentary on just five of the paper's prescribed texts and four of her own choice, Mrs. Krook develops "a theme concerning the nature of the moral life, and an interpretation of the history of English thought based on this view of the moral life". The "theme" is "man's capacity to be transformed by love as an intrinsic constituent of human nature", and the "history" is the tracing of three main traditions which Mrs. Krook characterises in terms of this theme. The "Christian-Platonic or religious" tradition, which is studied in the *Gorgias* and the First Corinthians, takes a "high" view of human nature and believes in "the redemptive power of love", while the "utilitarian" tradition, represented by works by Aristotle, Hobbes and Hume, takes a "low" view and disbelieves in that power. The tradition of "religious Humanism", her own position, Mrs. Krook describes as a recent derivative development: in Mill's *Three Essays on Religion*, Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*, Bradley's *Ethical Studies* and Lawrence's story *The Man Who Died*, she sees important steps towards a position that takes from the older "religious" tradition its "high" view and belief in "love", while rejecting belief in the supernatural and, with the "Utilitarians", basing itself on an appeal to experience.

In the last chapter, "Messianic Humanism", it becomes evident that Mrs. Krook thinks of her work as having a very urgent contemporary significance. For "the most obscure and mysterious part of religious Humanism" is the "view", "implicit in Lawrence's story", shared by Mrs. Krook and enjoined on us, that "the true Humanism must be Messianic", that "the Humanist is still in the grave, awaiting the true Annunciation", and that, when He comes, He will bring men a more complete salvation than the Christian salvation mainly by teaching more adequately on the subject of sexual love. This will finally make perfect the Christian-Platonic idea of "redemptive love".

Mrs. Krook adds that Lawrence's weaknesses as a man mar this "prophetic or quasi-scriptural work" of his. Because of his imperfect "understanding on the value of his story as a Humanist text" and because of "the ultimate imperfection of Lawrence's understanding of his own gospel of sexual love", the first half of the book is both "doctrinally" and "artistically" faulty, and Mrs. Krook proposes and sketches "a 'revised version'" which "would have been a better story than Lawrence's." And she goes on: "But such a fable, one feels, being outside of the compass of Lawrence's vision, was probably also outside of the compass of his powers as an artist. It is a conception better adapted perhaps to the genius of the angelic novelist Henry James." Mrs. Krook seems to define her own position in this "emergent Humanist tradition" in a modest concession in the preceding chapter:

. . . one is not oneself the Son of God and therefore has not the power to speak the Word in the way in which only the Son of God can speak it. But speak the Word one must when one knows what the Word is that must be spoken.

* * *

Wouldn't Mrs. Krook think me trifling if, after being offered this revelation, I confined myself to saying that her philosophical commentary and history seem to me unsound? Perhaps I shall be able just to suggest incidentally that unsoundness if, not shirking the main question, I try to give my reasons for not thinking that Mrs. Krook has the religious insight she pretends to.

There is, first of all, the question of the necessary inwardness. One of the most arresting things in Plato is surely his attitude towards his own work. He stated, late in his life, that he had never published his philosophy, that he would have been wrong to attempt to do so, and that the published dialogues were not what he himself valued most in his work: the few people that the published philosophy could have helped would, he says, have found it out for themselves with a little hint, and, for the rest, some would have been harshly contemptuous and, with others: "it would just have gone to their heads, giving them the idea that they had learnt something very solemn" (to translate freely). Plato's attitude here in the Seventh Letter, and elsewhere (in the *Republic* Socrates is reverently reluctant to try to be explicit about his deepest beliefs about life), constantly, sharply questions the assumption which we are always settling down into, that we have understood the 'meaning' of the dialogues. Further, the attitude strikingly confirms Plato's abiding claim to serious attention: it is not perhaps even possible to understand fully what he meant, but we can surely see in his attitude the profound perception that a wisdom that is not inwardly possessed is only words. It is characteristic of Mrs. Krook that she should find this attitude of Plato's, which she has apparently had no difficulty in understanding, to be clearly and simply a weakness

(pp. 133-135). For Mrs. Krook hesitation or indecisiveness in speaking of the deepest and most difficult parts of human experience is due to intellectual and spiritual incapacity (see also pp. 246-7, 253-4). And she herself is certainly never either hesitant or indecisive. Besides doing for Plato what he was unable to do for himself, Mrs. Krook undertakes in her general theme to expound the deepest spiritual experience of men, what Matthew Arnold called "some of the most delicate, intricate, obscure, and contradictory workings and states of the human spirit", with a very confident enthusiastic definiteness. (I do not think Mrs. Krook would claim that her definiteness is that of the writer whose free spontaneous insight expresses itself in language of poetic force.) One example will both suggest how external Mrs. Krook's language is and perhaps confirm the justice of Plato's apprehensions :

For Socrates, the master of moral wisdom, knows (though he does not, of course, let on that he knows) that the good, the true, and the beautiful are, in the end, all one.

The reader will judge for himself from this whether the word "love" that is so frequently used in the book is used with much fullness and inwardness of meaning.

From where, then, if not from rare religious genius, does Mrs. Krook derive her quite extraordinary assurance and energy? The vivid impression that they are derived from a very powerful but much more egotistic inner drive, religious rather than religious, which she herself does not recognise, has to be mentioned because it also seems the only adequate explanation of how all real, profitable thinking has been frustrated in her book. I think I can make this clearer by referring to what Mrs. Krook does to Socrates.

In a fairly full consideration of the *Gorgias*, Mrs. Krook makes nothing at all of what is surely quite an important part of Plato's passionate justificatory manifesto : the effective dramatic contrast, quite bitterly felt by Plato, between the uncommon disinterestedness of the spirit of Socrates' engagement in philosophical discussion and the very different attitudes of his interlocutors. The reader is made to feel in the contrast how quite unusually capable Socrates is of keeping *himself* out of the discussion, of genuinely and in perfect good temper wanting to hear *other* people's thoughts, to be contradicted by them when he is wrong, to share with them as equals in the exploration and only to move forward *with* them. The omission of any reference to this by Mrs. Krook is explained by her remarkable Appendix on Socrates' dialectical method. There we are told that the Socratic dialectic, which Mrs. Krook affirms was not much used in Plato's Academy, is an inferior, severely limited kind of teaching in comparison with the "didactic" kind of 'master-lecturing-to-pupils', and that it was employed by Socrates merely as a useful tactical instrument for dealing with the ill-disposed "ordinary unreflective man". This was the kind of man Socrates

talked with in the Athenian market-place (Mrs. Krook seems to say, p. 304, that he is fully and fairly represented by Callicles, Polus and Thrasymachus!⁽¹⁾), and she opposes to him the more intelligent student of the Academy or the Lyceum who was willing just to listen and assent to what the "master" gave. At a stroke we have a very different Socrates. His self-deprecatory irony and his fine urbanity are made to appear like common vulgar conceit, and the truly great achievement of that humane and very intelligent ideal of educational method and shared intellectual exploration that is rightly associated with Socrates' name⁽²⁾ becomes a "logical strategy" (p. 311) for dealing with "playboys" (p. 305).

Mrs. Krook's lack of feeling for these Socratic virtues is evident in the way in which her whole book is written—in the main commentary on texts, in the many inaccuracies, in the tone.

She seems never to have learnt, or she has forgotten, the value of the ability to listen. She has not 'listened' to what the writers she deals with have to say: she has just used them for her own ends, and, accordingly, we learn from her next to nothing about them. Each of her nine main writers is smoothly 'proved' to be, willy-nilly, a member of one of her three "camps" or "sides" (as she sometimes calls her "traditions"): this is her "history". The humanity of Aristotle, in the *Ethics*, is perhaps her most unfortunate victim. After all these years and in a century when many scholars have shown good reasons for moving even further in the opposite direction, he is decisively 'shown' to have expressed "an implacable hostility to the moral philosophy of Socrates and Plato" and to have thought of Socrates as "a moral crank or eccentric of a type not harmful but merely tiresome"; we are 'shown' that he shared a "common view of man's nature" with Thomas Hobbes, and indeed that the *Nicomachean Ethics* was just a "sketch" of the philosophical position given its "full definitive study" in the *Leviathan*.⁽³⁾ How does Mrs. Krook 'show' or 'prove' such points? When we look at the detailed arguments, we are, I think, all the more convinced that, for all her immense confidence in her rightness, Mrs. Krook did not fully understand what she was doing in writing this book. She shows competence in the summary of philosophical arguments⁽⁴⁾ when there is no conflict between the text and what she

(1) Where was Plato taught by Socrates?

(2) Would the Cambridge system of teaching in "supervisions" have quite its present form if Socrates had never lived?

(3) Besides being this, the *Leviathan* is also, we are told, a "tragic" work of art with a "rhythm" "as intensely and intricately organised as the dramatic movement of a Shakespeare tragedy". But does the *Leviathan* convince us that Hobbes had *any* deep experience of life?

(4) Will not the book help to point the general moral that the achievement of that competence—a competence so commonly demanded and respected—is not very intellectually demanding; or, at any rate, that it demands the development of a special and very limited kind of intelligence?

wants it to be, but in all other respects her assured clarity and definiteness in comment are superficial. One example will be enough. When Mrs. Krook is 'showing' that Aristotle had a "low" Hobbesian view of human nature, "radically divergent from the Platonic (and the Christian) view", which is the "high" view, she quotes references in the *Ethics* to the amenableness of "the many" to fear rather than to honour, reason, or moral ideals, and she goes on :

No sane man would wish to deny that this is at least partly true of "the many"; if it were not, there would be no need of laws or law-courts or police-officers or prisons. But the fact that it is a part of the truth does not make it the whole truth, or even the most important part of the truth about man's nature. Yet that Aristotle does take it to be the most important part of the truth about man's nature is shown by some of the main doctrines of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which make sense only on such a low view of "the many" and would make sense on no other.

"Much option Aristotle has in the matter!", we feel. If Mrs. Krook is at all aware of how she is forcing things here, how can she not also be aware that many schoolboys would know that a certain predecessor of Aristotle's was even famous for his low view of "the many", and would be able to see that jump from "the many" to "man's nature"?

The same confident determination to have her own way with history seems a more likely explanation than laziness of the lack of natural disinterested curiosity (Mrs. Krook does not appear to have read very widely in this field) and the indifference to, or ignorance of, facts. The small examples already incidentally given sufficiently indicate this less important failure.

Though it is very difficult to believe that he would give such a strong impression of bullying past writers and history, a religious genius does not perhaps care very much about historical fairness and accuracy. The very serious unwisdom of Mrs. Krook's book is felt more unmistakably in its constant tone. Mrs. Krook seems quite unaware how forcibly she is compelling her reader the painful choice of 'all or nothing' : at no point in the book does she make any attempt to conciliate him, to make it easier for him to accept the book's startling theses. Unaware of the reader, and unaware of all the obstacles lying in her way in his possible unpreparedness, cynicism, 'pudeur', scholarship or wisdom, she goes right over these and marches dead straight, and with not a break of humour, from beginning to end of the book. The only variation in the insensitive tone occurs when she falls even deeper into this kind of thing :

These for the prophetic mind are the fumbblings, often unendurably pitiful, of the unilluminated. . . .

In other painful passages, Hume is also the victim of a spiritual patronising. And what are we to make of the writer who suggests

to the Bishops of the Church of England with a solemnly explanatory enthusiasm that they should not still be putting any value on the practice of sexual abstinence since the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection are never more intensely or vividly present to the Christian, "one imagines", than during sexual intercourse?

* * *

I ought perhaps to add a comment on the "subsidiary object" of this book: "to indicate how the skills of literary criticism may be found useful in the study of philosophical works". Probably the only necessary comment of Mrs. Krook's case about "literary skills", as she keeps on calling them, is to say that there are no such things. There is only sensitiveness, the ability to 'listen', and the "discipline in scrupulous sensitiveness of response":

The critic of poetry should have the finest tact, the nicest moderation, the most *free, flexible, and elastic* spirit imaginable.

Mrs. Krook's "literary skills" found the tone of *Literature and Dogma* (admirably) "insistent, fevered, angry, scornful, and scorchingly ironic": poor Arnold thought his style was "sinuous, easy, unpolemical"!

Arnold himself made out an impressive case for a fuller, freer play of the mind in philosophical reading than is often permitted by traditional ideas of philosophical rigour. The case is certainly important for the English student, or the general reader, who wishes to get as directly as possible at what there is of a central human intelligence in the most promising philosophical classics and in their kinds of thought. What Arnold had in mind was not the bringing of further special "skills" to a philosophical work. It was the bringing into freer play of native critical judgment, a judgment available to "almost anyone with a fair mind" to whom literature and history had given "a wide and familiar acquaintance with the human spirit and its productions, showing how ideas and terms arose, and what is their character". An example will make Arnold's point. It was Cornford who naturally, with no special "literary skills", came to the quite central judgment that important parts of the *Gorgias* are "marked by a bitterness of tone rarely found elsewhere in the dialogues" (apparently missed by Mrs. Krook), and who saw some of the dangers involved in the writing of histories of philosophy, particularly for the more egotistic mind:

. . . the history of philosophy ought not to resemble too closely the minute-book of a debating-society controlled by a competent chairman. If we dwell too much on these influences and interactions, it becomes fatally easy to weave the succession of systems into a neat pattern, preconceived by the historian, as if they were parts of a single design, supplementing and playing into one another.

J. M. NEWTON.

T.R.

Granted that what we summon is absurd :
Mustaches and the stick, the New York fake
In cowboy costume grinning for the sake
Of cameras which always just occurred ;
Granted that his Rough Riders fought a third-
Rate army badly run, and had to make
Headlines to fatten Hearst ; that one can take
Trust-busting not precisely at its word ;

Robinson, who was drunken and unread,
Received a letter with a White House frank.
To court the Muse, T.R. might well have killed her,
And had her stuffed, yet here this mountebank
Chose to belaulrel Robinson instead
Of famous men like Richard Watson Gilder.

DONALD HALL.

Caribbean

Montego Bay
in its quick curve
listens
to the plane, waiting
for the cross of silver to
soften down.
In the air, above,
past the frail
wing and the gauze
glint of propellers,
we see the thick
curve of the green—
the aqua-
marine !
This is the Caribbean
Sea, and the Bay
which gathers into
its shadows all
measures of green,
until, in the sun, the
patches declare
communities of depth, from
bright to sombre.
'Touch them.

DONALD HALL.

Travellers

These are the friends I like—not those
Whose hearts even for a moment exposed
Are wounded, and fiction piles on fiction
To prevent more pain—a section
Is all I ask. The part of a man
One meets in a train, home-going, drinking
The night away, and thinking
Aloud of his wife not seen for
Eight long months or more.

The returned emigrant, smart
New Zealand suit and tie,
Rich, able; silent, shy.
What will they think of him come back again?
Will his brothers laugh at his chromium world
Who never left Castlemaine?

Or the woman who danced with that lithe
Supple negro boy (in Snow Hill waiting room
To a journeying steel band), he chaffing,
The musicians earnest, abstracted, and she
Swirling rejuvenated, and finally sitting down laughing.

Or the thirty-year-old English girl from Cyprus.
Although proud, self-confident, self-trained more than most
To an independent self-sufficient life,
She was going happy, ten years to unlearn, to be a wife.

And thousands more, whose recollection
Conjures a pleasanter world around; in
Certain cases one might almost
Meet them again without fear of wounding.

W. F. C. PURSER.

Poem

These things you neither thought nor believed
And yet you chattered on.
It was not to impress—I'm not deceived
So easily (you know that,
And besides, you don't care what I think)
Nor was it done to set a common stage
On which we both might act;
For you talked, and I posing as sage
Nodded understandingly
While I thought, How beautiful her eyes
How pretty her lips

this you know

So why?

Perhaps you were bored with just us two,
One room and day, and so
You made this world of strange occurrences
And stranger thoughts, things you'd not
Dream of acting on.
Well—I could not say who'd got
The best of it :
You in childish fantasy or I
Watching your delicate movements. But why?
W. F. C. PURSER.

The Approval Game

The difficulty in discussing undergraduate literature arises from a tendency to disregard the obvious conditions that university life imposes on young writers. Such conditions are in part external, and most of them seem, at first sight, inevitable; the curious combination of isolation and cliquishness, for example, produces a corresponding combination of immaturity and self-confidence with which those who read *Granta* and *Delta* will be familiar. It would be a simple enough matter to assume that undergraduates cannot write interesting short stories—poetry is a rather different matter—exactly because they lack both the humility and the experience necessary for a real understanding of what people are. The confident analyses, the knowing observations, the self-obsessed gestures towards complex judgments—all the symptoms, in fact, of most undergraduate short stories—stem, not from sophisticated callousness, but from simple-minded unawareness. None of this is necessarily disastrous, for generally one assumes that those for whom writing is more than a kind of clever self-display are sufficiently careful of their talents to avoid indulging or coarsening them in the present Cambridge atmosphere. The temptation to indulge, on the other hand, is undoubtedly strong, and it is not difficult to find victims, genuinely talented victims, who have lacked the courage to resist—the standard case is Auden, against whom there appears to have been a conspiracy of approval in Oxford and in London at the very time when critical control was most needed, and whose talent was consequently converted, by the pressure of admiration, into a liability. The assumption, really, that the talented will also be careful is as ingenuous as the assumption that the careful must be talented.

At the same time, to accept the difficulties involved in writing short stories is not to imply that short stories cannot be written by undergraduates. Immaturity, if it is accompanied by honesty, need not disqualify the perceptive from producing interesting work, just as self-confidence, of the right kind, need not exclude the fundamental humility without which no real art is possible. This is simply another way of saying, of course, that the cliquishness and isolation of the present Cambridge literary world are, after all, not necessary,

but accidental conditions, and that the undergraduate magazines may yet serve a useful function. Before they can do so, however, the present atmosphere of complacent self-approval must be dispelled, for good literature, even at the undergraduate level, depends on an absence of cosiness and an awareness of the value of honest criticism, and what Cambridge has been displaying recently is a predominance of the first, and a positive hostility towards the second.

The most immediate danger in attempting to describe this sort of situation is that one is too often reduced to hurling adjectives into the vacuum of politeness, if only because the effort of specifying and quoting examples of intellectual dishonesty and complacency is, by its very nature, distasteful. However, last term's first number of *Granta* provided, in the publication and subsequent critical reception of a short story called *The Fantasy Level*, an almost perfect opportunity for tracing in some detail the structure of the Cambridge literary world, and the way in which it works to ensure the worst sort of atmosphere for creative writing.

Now *The Fantasy Level* differs little from the usual run of creative writing published in Cambridge. It deals, so far as one can disentangle any essential theme from the jungle of grotesquely worked images and metaphors, with a young woman on the brink of a potentially disastrous marriage. The young woman's personality and problem are mainly presented in a series of cameos—a conversation with a mongoloid girl, a conversation with an old friend, and a conversation with the mongoloid girl's mother. The method of presentation, "style" in its deliberate and most self-conscious sense is the operative word, is a melange of imitations held together by a cluttered "poetic" prose; one of the models for imitation escapes me altogether, but its effect is of Runyonesque whimsy :

He is not an interesting member of his profession as members of his profession go, but he is headed now to return the lorry, to make his rounds, and to pummel his agent into delivery of an almost promised audition for the new Teichmann farce : and unless this goes very much better than it is prudent to expect, he will not return until after dark, by which time we shall certainly have wandered away, so a word ought to be said about him here.

Miss Burroway wanders away all right, juggling less and less dexterously but more and more ambitiously with her syntax : "He is by profession a sham lackey, and moves from one to another pretence of menial position, in the name of art" until she reappears in a poetic vein with "the sun slashed down between the buildings of Eighty-second street in a brash pie slice from behind." That's the sort of thing Miss Burroway's sun does. And the prose is already sweeping off in a stream of alliteration :

Stately circles of plaster posies intertwined on the ceiling, a slack string of carven seashells hung on the rose-coloured mantelpiece, a chipped nymph or two danced on the baseboard of the plaster corners, out of time with the radio drone. The wooden lacework of the window arch, arrested at just past its peak. . . .

The interesting point about writing of this sort, of course, is that for all its claims to "richness" and "poetic density", it never rises above the level of rhetoric. There are moments when one feels that one is locked in a cupboard with a compulsive shouter :

It was a dark apartment, musty with the smell of fifty years' short leases, dark with the inexplicable persistence of a New York interior, dark when she shuttered the last window, dark when she illuminated the pulsing spiral of fluorescent bulb which hung from the gilt chain of a defunct chandelier.

It was a dark apartment . . .

In fact, for all the insistence, ("dark" is used five times, every noun is chained down with adjectives) we are given no impression, no real feeling of the apartment at all; the prose, with its coarse rhythm and bullying movement, thumps and hammers the intended sense out of our minds entirely, and leaves nothing behind but jangling nerves.

Wedged in between the brash pie slices of prose are lumps of imitated dialogue :

"Well," Gloria said, "he's very quiet unless he's high. He's an actor."

"An actor!" Sybil exploded. "I should guess I know he's an actor! Listen, Gloria, I'm telling you, you've got a very talented man there."

"I know."

"Did you see him in the, what's it, you know, 'The Purple Fury'?" etc., etc., etc.

This might almost have come from a Salinger short-story—"almost" because the uniquely personal tone sometimes achieved by Salinger in his dialogue is missing, while the speech mannerisms of a Salinger character remain as a substitute for any genuine observation of what is revealed by people about themselves when they speak. But the mechanical chattering of Miss Burroway's characters, unlikely as it is, has more reality than the piece of stage-rhetoric in which one of them abruptly indulges herself :

"Do you know how you sound? You sound like a Victorian grandmother with a whole new system of Freudian discretion. You sound like you're making the introduction to Psycho-analysis into the Goley's Lady's Book. You sound about as scientific as Billy Sunday. You sound a little out of date."

During the course of the conversation, which never moves beyond the point suggested by the quotations given above, an extraordinary figure makes a number of appearances :

- (1) The waiter greeted her with a slim lifting of a brown forefinger, and when she said, "I'm looking for a Miss Snipe," he arched his black brows to his receding hairline, showing a remarkable crystalline whiteness of eyes and teeth in a mud-coloured face at the level of her lowest beads. He dug three grooves in the sawdust floor with his fingers as he bowed, and wheeling, motioned her. . . .
- (2) Gnome-like, waist-high, the waiter led her squeaking through a sawdust path more atmospheric than clean, verifying her existence with a furtive eyeball over the left shoulder.
- (3) The empty chair drifted back at a deft touch of the miniature hands, and the waiter executed a perfect pirouette and retreated with his hands clasped in an intense servility and pride.

It is impossible to determine the function of this simian gnome in *The Fantasy Level*; he is there, persistently, grotesquely, like a visit from a nightmare, but no attempt is made to relate him to the central theme, or to place him in any significant context. Certain questions, however, literally force themselves on our bemused attention. What, for example, is "a slim lifting of a brown forefinger"? What is meant by "a sawdust path more atmospheric than clean"? How can a man so small—although, admittedly, possessed of arms gorilla-like in length—hope to wait on a table without climbing on to a chair first? How does he manage that trick with his eyeball and left shoulder? And that bow?, etc. After reading Miss Burroway's cartoon-like descriptions, one feels like pirouetting out of the room into the fresh air with one's fists clenched in an intense frustration and misery.

There is much more in *The Fantasy Level* that produces a similar effect on the nerves and temper: the scene with the (of course) mongoloid child, for example, which again reads like a pastiche of Salinger (a pastiche, by the way, which brings out the element of *simplesse* of which Salinger is often guilty); or the portentous descriptions of physical mannerisms which run all the way through the piece, abounding as they do in phrases like "weird oblique red gaze", "conceded from a curious distance", "begrudged intensity", "the oblique blank gaze"; all of which seem, on consideration, meaningless. No real sense of how the central character reacts to the situation can be given through this kind of clumsy, literary knowingness; no serious comment on her dilemma can be made; the situation, the people, the geography—all are destroyed (if they were ever there) by an intoxicated facility that never, in spite of its posturing, goes beneath the surface. In fact, what is particularly interesting about *The Fantasy Level*, as a whole, is exactly the tendency to self-publicity that runs through it; the obsession with "technique" and "poetic expression" can be seen finally as a product, not of a sensitive awareness, but of a bland

indifference, to other people. One feels that the writer's ego obtrudes insistently between her observation and her recorded response, while the clamouring, rhetorical prose reveals that response as it is coarsened and narrowed by the obtrusion. This becomes both offensive to the reader and dangerous to the writer—offensive, because it affronts our sense of how complex and unique people are; dangerous, because each exercise of this sort on Miss Burroway's part is likely to drive her further away, at least in her writing, from a perceptive understanding of feeling and behaviour.

Ordinarily, of course, it would be unfair to submit the story to anything but a cursory reading; it was not until the reviews came out that it became clear that more was involved than merely the publication of a bad piece of writing. Here, for example, is Mr. Tony Stephenson, writing in *Varsity*:

For my money, one story by Janet Burroway is worth a year's issue of any Cambridge magazine you care to name. "The Fantasy Level", once you have leapt the hurdle of the first sentence, is perceptive, eccentric and moving. It was written by a real person who speaks in her own voice and knows exactly what she is trying to say, and what is more she can handle child-adult relationships in a way that makes Salinger look mawkish. "Granta" is worth buying if only for this story.

Elaine Feinstein, in *Broadsheet*, assumes a more cautious tone:

This is the most ambitious of Janet Burroway's stories I have seen, and in technique at least far more adventurous than most undergraduate writing can hope to be. Where she is trying to suggest the physical quality of a woman's life with an accumulation of detail, her long chunky sentences resemble Saul Bellow. Sometimes her selection of detail is knowing rather than perceptive—"paisley ties", or "Guatemalan" suits—but the superfluity is itself a relief. It is refreshing to recognise a talent that needs restraining.

Well, if we look at these reviews carefully, what do we find? For all of Mr. Stephenson's confident, knowing manner (and freedom with his purse), he offers no evidence to substantiate his judgment at all. The terms are either vague and gesturing—"perceptive, eccentric and moving"—utterly meaningless—"it was written by a real person who speaks in her own voice and knows exactly what she is trying to say" (what, Mr. Stephenson, *is* she trying to say?)—or downright fatuous "she can handle child-adult relationships in a way that makes Salinger look mawkish." (So much then, in Mr. Stephenson's account, for Salinger.) Mrs. Feinstein, on the other hand, achieves a remarkable feat of double-talk in contriving to suggest approval without having to commit herself to any direct judgment. The majority of her observations are disingenuous and irrelevant—the reference to Saul Bellow, for example; in her most

adventurous comment — “sometimes her selection of detail is knowing rather than perceptive — ‘paisley ties’ or ‘Guatemalan’ suits—but this superfluity is itself a relief,” the trivial criticism glides, with the help of two illogical transitions, far out of sight.

In these two reviews, one absurdly flattering, the other smoothly evasive, we are offered perfect examples of the way in which a kind of intellectual approval game is played in Cambridge. Mr. Stephenson, it is true, may only be guilty of poor judgment, but what possible justification can there be for Mrs. Feinstein’s evasive tactics and the air of polite, presiding dignity with which she attempts to conceal them? Is this sort of critical approach—either insensitive or dishonest—typical of Cambridge criticism? Perhaps it is not quite typical, for here is Miss Margaret Drabble, with a rather different line, reviewing last term’s *Delta* in *Varsity*. Miss Drabble gives us a clue to the real nature of her interest in literature at the end of a reproving paragraph dealing with W. I. Carr’s essay on T. F. Powys :—

Please let us remember that criticism is a mental process directed solely to appreciation and understanding, and if the process begins and ends in the head, so much the better.

Unfortunately, Miss Drabble does not go on to tell us how big her head is, or how much, in the way of nerve ends, muscles, etc., she believes to be packed into it. But what, one wonders, is the “mental process” for which this spinsterish-sounding plea is made? And what does a phrase like “appreciation and understanding” mean in the context in which Miss Drabble places it in her review? One is less confused, however, than one would instinctively prefer to be, for behind what appears to be a Tripos cliché there lurks a calculated rejection of all that is vital in literature. “Understanding and appreciation” are really being put forward, not as terms vaguely descriptive of a complex critical response, but as substitutes for feeling, as a means of evading all the personal problems that arise in a direct reaction to art.

How disastrous Miss Drabble’s conception of criticism is she demonstrates in her own review, where she puts it to particular application. Here is what she has to say about a poem called “Piece Work”, printed in the edition of *Delta* with which she is dealing (the poem) : “has a complexity of feeling not merely superficial, and an unusual control over a multiplicity of images : one sometimes feels aural effects are unduly prominent, as in

*I am all stone sown upon cold fallow,
All froth-fill sunk to a bare hollow*

but on the whole they are remarkably successful.”

It is an interesting sign of Miss Drabble’s approach that she puts her finger on the two most revealing lines in the poem, and yet, in her effort to “appreciate and understand”, misses the real

point to be made about them. The truth is, of course, that the poet is not "all stone sown upon cold fallow, / All froth-fill sunk to a bare hollow," nor has she ever been; if she had been, she wouldn't be so eager to shout about it. No, it's really just Miss Burroway again, writing a poem this time, and finding it easier to pretend to conditions, especially large, final ones, than to work out what she is really thinking and feeling. These two lines merely make explicit the tendency to self-protestation that is present, a trifle more discreetly, in *The Fantasy Level*. As for the poem as a whole, it is scarcely necessary to turn up a piece by Hopkins to realise how insincere and vulgar is Miss Burroway's imitation (or, once again, is parody intended?) of his technique. With Hopkins, every word counts, every word has a special, dramatic strength in the rendering of a particular perception or feeling; when Miss Burroway attempts to produce a sensation by using the characteristic Hopkins means of expression, however, the result is very different:—

for all of the spite
*Spent in the piercing, needle-fierce fingered,
 Needle-eyed-piercing, scrappy, angered,
 Beyond belief at interruption or thread-knot;*

the words are no longer a part of the perception itself; they are bullied into conjunction externally to produce an effect exactly opposite to the one intended in that we are forced to stop and work out, also externally, what that intention is. If "Piece Work" has any value at all, it is in illustrating the dangers of reading superficially the work of an original poet. It might seem unfair to use Hopkins as witness against an undergraduate poem, but Miss Burroway, by unholy imitation and echo,¹ has invoked the comparison herself. For Miss Drabble, on the other hand, to call intention to a "complexity of feeling not merely superficial" (what evidence is there, Miss Drabble, of any feeling at all?) and to an "unusual control over a multiplicity of images"—there is certainly a multiplicity of something, but "images" hardly seems the appropriate definition—appears a gratuitous offence even to a process "that begins and ends in the head." And this, presumably, is the sort of criticism Miss Drabble offers as an alternative to the "vein of academic healthiness" she finds so distasteful in Mr. Carr's essay on Powys.

These three reviews—Mrs. Feinstein's, Mr. Stephenson's and Miss Drabble's—may not be significant or interesting in themselves, but viewed together as symptoms of a general *malaise* they have a definite diagnostic value. What can be most easily deduced from

(1) For example:—

*All, all as a fall pavement, leaf effort strewn,
 And the crisp colours trod with the litter down
 To barren monotone, rag straggle of grief.
 How then pattern the raveling, the stain of life?*

them is the extent to which literature is treated as a social-intellectual game at Cambridge—at least at the public level. If I appear to have concentrated my attention on Miss Burroway's writing to the point of callousness, I have done so because she has provided the focal point for the most obvious recent example of the way in which false discrimination and hypocritical good manners (it is of course difficult to distinguish the one from the other) conspire together to produce a general atmosphere of complacency and intellectual laxness in the university. It might also be worth pointing out that the general damage caused by the attitude reflected in these three reviews is an extension of the particular damage inflicted on whatever talent Miss Burroway, for instance, might genuinely possess; to encourage her in the sort of dishonest posturing revealed by the poem and the story dealt with here, is to assist her into a settled immaturity. Any help given to Miss Burroway can only be effective through the application of serious critical standards, however severe and destructive they may seem to those who have replaced them with insidiously debilitating criteria of another sort. It is hardly to the credit of the university literary world that those who might be active in enforcing such standards have been content to play the approval game, if only by accepting passively the assumption that inferior writing and bland self-congratulation are the best we can do. Cambridge has, in fact, come close to reflecting the worst side of the London intellectual scene, with its sham values and smooth, accomplished manners, close enough indeed to disturb anyone seriously interested in both the state of our universities and the present condition of English literature.

Such exasperation (which I had seriously intended, when I first started this article, to restrain) stems from the feeling that one is confronted in Cambridge with what amounts almost to a conspiracy. The exasperation is liable to be destructive, but at the same time any properly constructive approach, unrelated as it is bound to be to particular instruments, and concerned as it must be with a general attitude, is likely to sound either vague or obvious. The only effective means, at bottom, of ensuring healthy conditions for undergraduate writing depends on a revolution at a level to which neither pleading nor anger can reach. Perhaps all one can ask is that those who don't care for literature should stop pretending to, and that those who do care should make an effort to find out what they honestly feel about a particular piece, instead of rushing into print with an easily acquired set of reactions and attitudes. As a result, the undergraduate writers who might be forced into a more astringent self-criticism could also feel that there existed in the university a genuinely disinterested concern with what they have to say.

S. J. H. GRAY.

Book Reviews

SOME SHAKESPEAREAN THEMES, by L. C. Knights.

(Chatto and Windus, 18s.)

We estimate a literary critic's value by the evidence he provides as to the significance the work he is discussing holds for him as an individual person. Has he himself truly experienced whatever it is that he is trying to define? Has he honestly exposed himself to what the work offers? Has he really felt what he insists is there in front of him, and what he is trying to indicate for our advantage? If, on any occasion, we reasonably think that we can answer "no" to questions of this kind, then we are not dealing with what may be usefully regarded as literary criticism but are toiling in a limbo with materials drawn from unrecognised negative impulse, personal frustration, self-deception, or plain egotism. I make these points (that have no claim at all to originality) both shortly and dogmatically, partly because I think they are too obviously true to require defensive analysis, and partly to safeguard myself from menaces from the "criticism begins and ends in the head" school announced by some female contemporary last term. If there are still doubts, then ask these and the following questions. What do a brightly confident tone, a brutal vocabulary, and the constant presence of the clever as opposed to the intelligent, really indicate? They indicate surely a wrong kind of self-concern, and a palpable indifference to the work selected for discussion; but they frequently pass for literary criticism, as helps in the study of literature. The nature of true responsiveness is clearly subtle and complex in a way that has not been suggested here, and individual qualities are not merely involved in, they are directly challenged by the reading of a work of literature. If we have no directed, personal concern in our reading, then really we have nothing, except perhaps the self-laudation in which we may quite unconsciously have enlisted the particular work. I think nearly all of us, if we are honest with ourselves for a moment, will agree that we have quite often done just this; either pilfered from a work in the pursuit of some aim of our own, or contrived to hide from ourselves and others the painful fact that we haven't understood what the writer was offering us. Consider, for example, the moral sadism that might determine a favourable opinion of Fanny Price; or the sentimentality that might determine an unfavourable one. Naturally, it isn't this simple—she's hardly somebody you have met at a friend's. What signifies lies outside one's ordinary capacities, but we need to appreciate the factors that can come in and take control of the business of judgment.

In this connection, Professor Knights' new book has the advantage of supplying in an emergent phase some of the evidence pointed to in my first three or four lines. I say "in an emergent phase" because I think a reader will share with me the experience of eaves-

dropping on a private rumination; Professor Knights partly conveys the impression of one talking very much to himself, not yet adjusted to the work, and not yet adjusted to an audience. If this is felt to be impertinent, I may defend myself by saying that it is the best things in the book that permit one to suppose that a special kind of personal insistence is intervening between Professor Knights and the plays he considers. In the chapter on *King Lear*, for example, there is the following :

Only an inhibiting fear of life could prevent us from taking the full force of Lear's great indictment : only a refusal to meet honestly—so far as we may—all that Shakespeare sets in relation to it could make us blind to the irony—yes, even in this moment of keenest suffering—that plays about it. (p. 113)

I take it not at all as pious ejaculation, but as a defining of response towards the play, vouched for by the delicacy of analysis of themes and figures at its centre. The quality of the last three sections of that chapter in particular oblige me to recognise that Professor Knights has undergone the experience of the play; so that instead of the brisk no-nonsense manner of *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?*, we have criticism which is really of the centre, which doesn't simply leave us baffled before a display of competence making for the irritable "What on earth is there left for me to feel and say?" We have, in other words, a rare advantage in what we read of Shakespeare criticism—the opportunity to share in Professor Knights' work, and (more importantly, of course) to work for a personal reading of the play.

The chapter on *Macbeth* also seems to me impressive (though not of the order of the chapter on *Lear*). My parenthesis nudges me into enquiring why, and I recall a comment in Professor Knights' introduction; "... a book cannot pursue us down the length of the Sacred Way" (p. 11). It's what I feel to be clustering around "Sacred Way"; varied private associations that make for an attitude that is often reverential rather than reverent. The attitudes to Time, and those conveyed in the word "Nature" are clearly intensely valuable in a discussion of major Shakespearean themes. But Professor Knights' possession of them can sometimes result in what looks to me like an enervation of response towards plays that do not commit him as fully as *King Lear*. What he says about *Henry IV* (Parts I and II) has been largely said by Mr. Traversi; and we have comments like "Hotspur is of course the chief exponent of Honour in the conventional sense, and the forced rhetoric with which he presents his ideal is comment enough" (p. 41). Is this all? Where is the sensibility human enough to refer, as it does later on to the scene where "Mrs. Quickly too has her moment, when sentimentality itself is transformed simply by looking towards those human decencies and affections for which — the realities being absent—it must do duty." (p. 60). Equally, the account of *Troilus*

and *Cressida* I felt rather to grind along; save where Troilus supplied occasion for a faintly parsonical note on Professor Knights' part. During a recent reading of the play I found myself rather bored with such an excess of one tone, such a strained debating of what do not emerge for me as essentials. And when I was interested it was usually in *Cressida* whom I did not find existing "mainly in the imagination of Troilus, etc. . . ." (p. 79). In Act III, Scene II, for example, she is for me a created person, as between Troilus and Pandarus; *My thoughts were like unbrideled children grone*, etc. And *I have a kinde of self recides with you / But an unkinde selfe that itselfe will leave, / To be anothers foole*. I find her moving in her doubt as to what she is and whether she can sustain a relationship, in a way that makes the others look banal.

And is there real warrant for referring to Coriolanus' "wanton disregard for the values that form the moral basis of any decent society" (p. 153) in the context of the "I'll mountebank their loves' speech? In the previous scene Coriolanus has told the patricians: *Your dishonour Mangles true judgement, and bereaves the State Of that Integrity which should becom't*; and in the "mountebank" speech we have *I will not doo't / Least I surcease to honour mine owne truth*, etc. Certainly, there is contempt for the people, but it is contempt from a standard (one not ours or Shakespeare's, of course) that is real enough — though warped, conditioned and limited enough to constitute his tragedy. Olivier's recent Stratford performance exhibited "wanton disregard"; but in Professor Knights' criticism it leads on to academic observations like "there is tragic dignity in his reply to Volumnia. . . . But there is also tragic irony" (p. 154—referring to the scene where Coriolanus decides to lead the Volscians away from Rome). Can we really leave it at that? But then "Coriolanus has none of the apocalyptic quality of *Macbeth*" (p. 153). And "apocalyptic," I think, is an odd kind of personal insistence, equivalent to the "Sacred Way", that usurps true reading.

The true merit of the book, however, lies in the degree of positive encouragement it provides for an individual reading of the plays. I found the book genuinely helpful (apart from reservations made, and there are others) in that I was continually reminded of the limitations of one kind and another that we all have as readers of Shakespeare. The value of the book will disappear, though, if (in the exchange of teaching) we harden what it offers into a system; or if we are determined that when we grow up we are going to be intellectuals. This isn't an end towards which the study of English naturally conducts us, and if once attained the experience of Shakespearean tragedy will be found to be largely irrelevant—if indeed such an admission ever gains a hold upon those who are likely to put themselves in a position where they ought to make it.

W. I. CARR.

SELECTED JOURNALISM: Stendhal. Edited and Introduced by Geoffrey Strickland. (John Calder, 30s.)

This collection of Stendhal's contributions to English periodicals and his early critical essays is not a mere appendix to his novels. It is, one might say "of course," extremely entertaining, but so is a great deal of his writing which does not claim our attention as forcefully as this does: Mr. Strickland is fully justified in claiming boldly that we have here "some of the most remarkable literary criticism ever to have been written in France and a rarely surpassed account of a crucial phase in the development of European civilisation".

Having asserted so much, Mr. Strickland, in his Introduction, immediately goes on to qualify, and this is certainly necessary. On a first reading it is the comments on social and political life that are immediately attractive for their penetration and wit: wit which, as the following quotation shows, is not as Proust asserts it is, that of Voltaire:—

"When she played the part of the widowed Queen of King Edward in *Richard III*, the scene in which she parts with her children left not a single eye in the house which was dry. It should be mentioned, however, that displays of maternal tenderness are quite the fashion in France at the moment; and with us fashion in anything, whether good or bad, is all powerful."

This hasn't, perhaps, the sureness of touch which is to be found in some of these pieces, but it illustrates the way in which Stendhal's wit springs from real human feeling, and not from a wish to amuse and impress: it produces a tingling awareness, instead of the weariness which Voltaire sometimes induces. But, while almost every piece yields some striking moral insight, those dealing with Italy and with French politics come to seem, as general pictures, more and more unreal. This was, it seems, a field in which his intelligence could not operate freely: he is so dominated by his own fears, uncertainties and hatreds, that he tends to present all political life either as sub-human antics, or as the most sinister melodrama; he is often defeated by the complexity of a situation, or left without a clue to motive, and he improvises an ingenious theory, partly, no doubt, to make an article, but also to satisfy his need to *feel* comprehension. The historian had better turn back to the novels where he can reach a deeper analysis, if he responds fully.

There is no doubt that it is as literary criticism, and criticism of the quality of life from which works of literature have sprung, that this book is really valuable. The early "Notes on Corneille", in reading which, as Mr. Strickland very justly says, "we seem to witness the growth and development of the intelligence itself," yields this, for instance (on Cinna's speech, Act I, Scene III):—

"This is a perfect model of the tragic style. There is a touch of affectation, but this is in no way cold or vulgar.

'Comme par un effet contraire', etc.

Apart from this, there is no other defect in this speech, nor, we may add, is there any hint that the speaker is a man without character momentarily exalted.

"The ending, 'Demain j'attends la fin', etc.

announces a mighty character and induces in the reader the quivering of a proud smile: he admires himself and imagines himself to be capable of sentiments as elevated as these."

The young man who wrote this brought to literature a magnificent intelligence, trained in the way which he recommended to another generation, when he wrote:—

"To-day, in 1822, men nearly always lie when they talk of their true motives. The most useful science for a young man, the science which at the age of twenty gives the clearest proof of intelligence, is that of penetrating lies of this kind. . . . There is a book whose title ought to be *The Art of Discovering Men's True Motives*. This book is *De l'Esprit* by Helvétius."

It would be very wrong to take this passage as an indication of the quality of Stendhal's preoccupation with psychological analysis; his intelligence was not simply cerebral. What is significant is his choice of Helvétius as a representative of the eighteenth century, choosing him because of his refusal to be drawn into the life of the court which would have made him compromise his intellectual standards: the significance is further pointed out when we remember that the other figure he singles out in that century is Johnson.

The critical approach, at the nature of which I have just been hinting, produces the most interesting accounts of Stendhal's contemporaries and immediate predecessors: for instance, this:—

"It is said in society that M. Benjamin Constant has depicted himself. As a young man, he was famous for his bravery and for his talents; he possesses in fact so acute and lively a mind, that he is able to see the reasons for every line of conduct that it is possible to pursue. This sort of infirmity is very common in France. As vanity has taken the place of every other passion, the humiliation lies, not in changing one's opinion, but in being unable to defend the opinion one has adopted by means of brilliant shafts of wit which silence one's adversary and, above all, which amuse the whole circle around one in the salon."

No one interested in the Romantic period can afford to neglect the direct profit to be gained from the remarks about Rousseau, Constant, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Byron and Scott which are collected here. The question which comes to mind on looking at such a list of names is, how impressive would Stendhal show himself once outside the relatively narrow range which it represents? And we can ask it without being wildly hypothetical, for we have in this volume his frequent remarks on Shakespeare. It is here that I have

to disagree most strongly with the judgments in Mr. Strickland's introduction: having quoted a passage in which Stendhal contrasts the "intimate knowledge" which we have of Shakespeare's characters with our external sense of Corneille's, he writes:—

"To admire the poetry of *Macbeth* for the way in which it defines and creates the dramatic themes is an astonishing proof of genius, when we think of the conventional approach to Shakespeare in 1811, not only in France but England. . . . Yet whatever else he got from the *Preface* [Johnson's] . . . it would not have encouraged him to look for expressiveness in Shakespeare's use of language, least of all in the poetry of *Macbeth*."

This seems to me to be a wilful forcing of the case for Stendhal; what evidence have we that he felt the force of Shakespeare's poetry more finely than Morgann, not to mention Johnson?

But I do not want to be taken as joining the chorus of reviewers who have attacked Mr. Strickland for overrating Stendhal as a critic. If there are places where it may be felt that he should have put his claims more cautiously, most of his emphases are justified. The charge most commonly made against him has been that he has implicitly placed Stendhal above Sainte-Beuve, and, while in most cases an appeal was being made to prejudice and critical inertia, there is an implicit challenge. Perhaps it can be met by admitting that Stendhal could not have offered say, Arnold and James, what Sainte-Beuve, for better and for worse, did, and then going on to point out that Sainte-Beuve has now been mediated for us, whereas we stand very definitely to profit from direct contact with Stendhal. He can help us to know what it is to be English, and to understand what it is to be French. We should be very grateful to Mr. Strickland for making his criticism available to us.

CHARLES PAGE.

THE FORESTS OF LITHUANIA, by Donald Davie.

(Marvell Press, 12/6).

When the publishers' hand-out arrived a few months ago, I'll confess, the suspicion did arise that these chunks of Mickiewicz adapted might turn out to be a piece of poetic book making, with just a nod at the appropriate Society. It's worth recording this guess, wildly out as it proved to be. For there are probably others who will be ready to dismiss the book as a collection of fugitive translations, gathered from the verse leavenings in formidable magazines from Santa Barbara, or to reject it as written with the left hand between more serious offerings. In fact, the work is significant in its own right, and not just as an interim report. And if the virtues it possesses *qua* long poem aren't altogether those ascribed by the blurb, they're very real and they do come from the use of this neglected *genre*.

Much of the usual praise given to Dr. Davie's earlier work is still applicable—tautness and control, the lucidity of a good prose statement. But the control is now a matter less of syntax than of the actual metric. There are passages in *terza rima* and other forms almost as strict. The main business, however, is carried through in a varied free measure. We don't get the feeling that the strophic devices are purely arbitrary, as in the case of Mr. Tomlinson (the trouble with whom is sometimes not that he pretends Pound never existed, but that he won't admit anyone else ever did). In places the verse approaches regular syllabic patterns; it's interesting that the traditionally slower-moving iambs seem here to be associated with a quick pace and a lighter tone :

*And now the swain
Forgets the maid
To court this ampler fair
Who sets in train
The ambushade
Of love, and baits the snare;
Now she delays
The murmured phrase
Which he must stoop to catch. . . .*

By the side of this the passage in which the judge offers decorum by way of reproof/*To the young Pan Tadeusz*, heavily end-stopped for the most part, seems almost sluggish in movement for all its conversational cadence. Even where the poet strays farthest from strict accentual verse, the technical discipline visibly remains. It is interesting to note how often an emphatic adjective comes at the end of a line (*a single/Yelp; honey-thick/Coffee, as aromatic/As mocha, amber-clear/On charming trays; the spellbound/Boy lamenting*; and *strange / Decorum this . . .*) with important nouns typically at the opening. The final position strengthens a weakish verb : *Hair / In curling-papers rays / A small head . . .*

Full rhyme is more noticeable than half-rhyme, uncharacteristically for these days; its function may be boldly sententious (as at the end of the Chamberlain's speech in the first section). Elsewhere, it seems to provide a conscious "poetic" note :

*Here the green
Tresses of carrot snared
Slim beans that stared
From a thousand eyes; the sage
And venerable cabbage,
That seemed to meditate
On vegetable fate,
Bared his bald head; the bold
And portly melon rolled
Far from his home, to wait
Upon the flushed estate
Of beetroots. . . .*

Here, the rhyme does nothing to submerge the pathetic fallacy, on the contrary. Davie's playing it up for all he's worth.

This botanical flourish, worthy of Erasmus Darwin, is matched by several features of the central section, "The Forest". The opening description is chiefly in octosyllabic couplets, and the poet isn't afraid of this kind of thing:

*Two that for straightness, hue and height
Surpass their sylvan neighbours quite. . . .*

The impression isn't one of bathos because the overall manner is assertively poetic, painstakingly artificial (in the old neutral, or good, sense). The fine passage beginning *Who has plumbed Lithuania's forest?* comes in easily enough, and the other set-piece, describing a horn display, succeeds admirably (*Cyclones/Of whirling air up-spiralled/To roll down and amaze the woods*). This is almost an auditory version of Troy's swordplay; the author doesn't, thank goodness, attempt anything in the way of Ginsberg's Authentic Bop Prosody (whatever that may be), but conveys it in the smooth pulse of a Jo Jones. As well as more botanical detail, we are given a lapidary such as English poetry can hardly have known in centuries and a succession of colour-drenched descriptions recalling the eighteenth-century examples in *Newton Demands the Muse*. And who, one wonders, last used "ebon" in a serious poetic context, or who since Edward Taylor let in "smaragdine"? Nor does one easily remember a modern poet using "involved" as Milton might have done, without a shadow of an ambiguity (the word's applied to the horn, and the abstract sense just isn't present). And in such a place as bald a piece of mythologising as "Ceres has banished Mars" doesn't jar.

Despite the author's liking for poets such as Johnson and Pound, this is by no means an Imitation: there's no whipped-up contemporaneity. The range of allusion is all the same pleasantly catholic: "You want a hick?" the Judge is asked, while a lady's ability to get away with a doubtful story unaffectedly becomes "Triumph of tone!" Phrases like *Himself/When young* occur not as literary treasure-hunt clues, but as items to which the poet can have legitimate recourse in his acknowledged task.

Davie appears to have sought, if not quite "some singable idiom", a form in which both narrative interest and detailed description can be unashamedly dwelt on. His bear-hunt is agreeably free of the cloudy symbolism we get in Faulkner's, for instance; and throughout his translation is marked by a return to the belief that continuity of overt theme is enough without a sustained conceit underlying. It may be, now that he has joined for the moment at least the same stable as Larkin and Holloway, that we shall have to look to Hesse rather than Russell Square for our future development. I don't think anyone could say that would be a bad thing.

PAT ROGERS.

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